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ABSTRACT

This document consists of the following three papers: (1) "Aging in the People's Republic of China" (Liang), including a 22-item bibliography; (2) "The Reform of China's Social Security System for the Elderly" (Chuanyi); and (3) "Developing Research on Aging in China" (Jihui). The first paper briefly outlines the history of gerontology in China, describes characteristics of the older Chinese population, explains population aging, describes old age support in both rural and urban areas, describes nonfamily provision for the elderly, and expresses concerns for the elderly Chinese of the future. The second paper considers the part in China's 2,000-year-old tradition played by family structure and respect for the elderly, describes the Chinese retirement system, explains reforms being considered for the retirement and insurance systems, lists activities in which the elderly are being encouraged to engage, mentions a university set up exclusively for the aged, recommends traditional exercises to help the elderly become healthier, and discusses types of activities that can be devised to make the life of the elderly more enjoyable. The third paper describes the Chinese response to the social problems posed by the elderly, explains the important role and the characteristics of the elderly, and discusses problems yet to be solved. Among them are elderly support, widowhood support, management of retirees, improvement of the social service for the elderly, and keeping up the moral standard. (CML)

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CHINESE PERSPECTIVES ON AGING IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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A Multi-University Consortium

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THE ORGANIZATION AND ITS MISSION

The International Exchange Center on Gerontology is an organization of centers and programs for gerontological research and teaching in both public and private universities throughout Florida. The University of South Florida is the headquarters or "host institution" for the IECG. The Center is new, having received its permanent funding in 1982, and operates under a Director and an Advisory Board of representatives from the participating universities.

The purpose of the IECG is to make available to policymakers in the State the best information that can be secured on policies, programs, and services for the elderly. This means collecting and analyzing experiences in such areas as transportation, health care, income security, housing, social services, nutrition, and other subjects that have a significant meaning in the daily lives of our elderly citizens. To carry out this mission, the IECG must communicate with political leaders, program administrators, academic institutions, and with experts in gerontology throughout the United States and the world.

Special attention will be given to program innovations, and to experiences that reveal both strengths and weaknesses in various approaches that have been tried in addressing the aspirations and needs of the elderly. Careful and frank exchange of information, and thorough analysis of policies and programs by policymakers and specialists in higher education offer an opportunity for examination from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

Florida has a unique opportunity for leadership in this field through the Center. Its concentration of elderly persons, and innovative programs like community care for the elderly, demonstrate the possibilities for both give-and-take of experiences. With assured continuing support, a small but highly qualified staff and faculty available in higher education throughout Florida, the IECG can develop a program that will greatly benefit all states. The pressures on state leadership to come up with wise decisions in human services is especially intense under the changing federal emphasis. The initiative is shifting more and more to the states, as federal funding is reduced. Useful information exhange will help state leadership to make increasingly difficult choices among competing priorities for limited funds.

Against the backdrop of a future which will feature exponential economic growth in the State, the influx of growing numbers of persons of working age, and the continuing increase in the number of persons over 60, Florida's policymakers need the best intellectual resources and insights that can be tapped. As a center for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information of this quality and depth, the higher education community can be of inestimable service to the political and administrative leadership of Florida. The IECG can serve as a vital link between the universities and colleges, and state and local governments.

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Foreword

The International Exchange Center has already published two reports on selected aspects of aging in the People's Republic of China, by two Native-born American social scientists.* This publication consists instead of contributions by three Chinese scholars one of them now an American citizen, Dr. Jersey Liang, of the University of Michigan. The other two reside in China: Yuan Jihui, Professor of Sociology at Shanghai University, and one of the founders of that megalopolis' gerontological society; and Chu Chuanyi, of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of American Studies, in Beijing.

The Exchange Center is indeed privileged to obtain permission from these authors to present their perspectives and findings about one of the newly emerging phenomena in, and socio-economic challenges to, the most populated country of the world. Dr. Liang's contribution is based on his expertise on the subject, and more explicitly on his visit in 1984 to the PRC as a member of an official delegation of American sociologists and anthropologists, under the sponsorship of the U.S. Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China, and hosted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Gerontology -- under one rubric or another -- is emerging as a special area of study in China. There is now a national Gerontological Committee, with strong ties to local branches organized by municipalities; and several publications dedicated to specific, concrete features of aging and the elderly.

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*Gordon F. Streib, of the University of Florida, and Harold L. Sheppard, of the University of South Florida. Their two essays were published as two chapters in Aging in China in early 1985.

As Liang reports, Shanghai's area-wide five-year plan lists aging as one of the priorities to be tackled by local government.

Some demographic nuances warrant our attention. For example, Liang points out that on a percentage basis, China has very few "old-old" individuals, those 80 and older, when compared with the more developed countries such as our own, Japan, or Sweden. But this is one of the special marks of the developing countries: with relatively lower life expectancies, it is possible to have a large population of persons 60 and older (the age at which developing countries begin to count their "elderly"), but with few surviving to 80 and older. Nevertheless, China's proportion of the "old-old" is generally higher than those in the developing societies. This definition of "when is old" cannot be separated from retirement age policy: at the present time retirement for men is generally at age 60; for women, 55. It will be interesting to see, over the coming decades, whether any reconsideration of these "pension ages" will take place -- stimulated by greater urbanization, industrialization, higher life expectancy, and expansion of pension coverage (with relatively adequate benefit amounts). This certainly is now the case with Japan.

The proportion of the Chinese population 60 and older will nearly triple over the next four decades -- partly as a result of the growth in numbers of that age group, partly as a result of the relative stabilization of the total population size. The latter is clearly a product of deliberate national policy: overpopulation is no longer a threat to the well-being of that country. However, unless new social and economic transformations are implemented, a growing proportion of aged Chinese can pose new problems.

This retirement age policy, as Liang makes clear, is essentially an urban phenomenon. In rural areas, he tells us, many older men in their seventies

continue to work. "...old age support should be treated separately for urban and rural residents." China has yet to establish a national, universalistic social security system which characterizes all industrialized economies. Thus, for most rural elderly, their support continues to derive from their families. But it should also be emphasized that even during their old age, "they contribute substantially to household income and the improvement of the standard of living in rural areas."

The most controversial and publicized feature of current Chinese domestic social policy is, of course, its current one-child-per-family policy. It is clear that as long as China does not have an adequate pension system, the reluctance to have small families will not be easily overcome. In a society without such a system, children are the support basis for the elderly. The urban situation is much more complex, and Liang provides an interesting exposition in his description of the status of older persons -- even of "young retirees," and the potential problems associated with that situation.

The Chinese authorities, needless to say, are keenly aware of the need for new forms of social security in the rapidly changing social structure of their country. Chu Chuanyi's essay here, on "The Reform of China's Social Security System for the Elderly," is an example of this growing awareness. The essay formed the basis of a seminar presentation at the International Exchange Center in early 1985.

As recently as October, 1984, the Chinese government announced its plans to include the total working population in the reformed pension system. Apparently, the authors of the proposal appreciate the potential enormity of such a pension system, judging from their perceptions of the "experiences of the welfare programs of developed countries." The recommendation is to

keep the pension system geared to the development of the economy. "An excessively high cost of the social insurance program will make an undesirable impact on the national economy."

But, according to Chu, there are other issues that still remain to be solved, for example, how can the costs of pensions be equalized among the many districts and enterprises of China's immense territory? How should the costs, the contributions, of such a social insurance system be allocated -- among workers and their enterprises? These and other aspects of work, aging, and retirement issues that China must confront are cited by him. All of this is evidence of China's conscious efforts to manage systematically the impending implications of an aging population of as much as 100 million in the coming decades. How the PRC innovates and adapts to the challenge shall become an intriguing process for Western gerontologists.

On a different level of analysis, Yuan Jihui's article on "Developing Research on Aging in China" is devoted to research in the sociology of aging. Yuan stresses the need to develop empirical research on this "serious social problem," as one way of working out solutions. Despite its classification as one of the developing countries, China, he writes, is nevertheless one of the "aged countries" of the world, given its relatively high life expectancy. Yuan believes that through "socialist construction ...and the development of the new socialist mood of respecting and providing for the elderly, the life span of the population will be longer than ever."

Reflecting much of the current mode of social policy thought in the PRC, Professor Yuan attributes the growth in the proportion of older persons in China not only to socio-economic progress and the birth control policy, but also to a combination of the centuries-old tradition of respect for the

elderly, and the socialist system. This type of rhetoric, however, does not prevent Yuan from recognizing that the growth "means there are more people who were once producers becoming consumers. That will cause a lot of new problems to families and society. Thus, it is urgent for us to be able to understand and solve these problems." Yuan gives examples, based on surveys, of severe problems that face some elderly in multi-generation households.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Yuan's contribution is his suggestion that changing events and population trends can evolve into social problems, the solutions to which require, in part, the use of modern social science research methods. Resort merely to faith in an ideology (whether rooted in ancient or contemporary China) will not suffice. Sociology was one of the main victims of the Cultural Revolution, and it is encouraging to see its resurgence in very recent years. Yuan Jihui's essay is but one example of this rebirth, applied quite concretely to the topics of gerontology.

I hope these three essays by Chinese social scientists will evoke both a greater sympathetic understanding of the important subject of aging in China, and will especially stimulate a sustained mutual exchange among gerontologists both here and in China (including Taiwan). Florida in particular might be of special interest to Chinese gerontologists, given its high concentration of elderly, and its own "policy responses" to that demographic development.

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Director

AGING IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA*

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A U.S. Sociology and Anthropology Delegation led by Professor Alice Rossi visited the People's Republic of China from February 16 to March 10, 1984. The purpose of this visit was to survey the status of sociology and anthropology in China. Sponsored by the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China (CSCPRC), the delegation was hosted in Beijing by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and was received by the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) in five other cities including Tianjin, Wuhan, Shanghai, Xiamen, and Ghangzhou. In each of the six cities contacts were made with Chinese social scientists in universities, research institutes, and professional organizations (Rossi, 1985). This report describes the general state of the sociology of aging and major concerns related to aging in China.

With more than one billion people, China accounts for nearly a quarter of the world's population. It also has the largest population of older people (65 and plus) in the world. The substantial decline of fertility during the past two decades has invoked a demographic revolution which will greatly accelerate the aging of China's population. It has been projected that some 25% of the entire Chinese population will be over the age of 65 by 2035 (Coale, 1981). Despite considerable interest in the aging of the Chinese population, relatively little is known about the characteristics of the Chinese elderly, the process of population aging, and the societal and economic implications.

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* I would like to thank Xiangming Chen, William Parish, Frank Richter, Alice Rossi, Gordon Streib, Ed Tu and Amy Wilson for their perceptive and useful comments on an earlier version of this paper. The assistance provided by Jorge F. Tapia is gratefully acknowledged.

This paper presents a preliminary examination of these issues. It draws upon the experience of the U.S. Sociology and Anthropology Delegation and is supplemented by relevant materials published in China as well as in the United States.

A brief historical review is necessary to provide a proper context for the discussion of the sociology of aging in China. Sociology was taught in China as early as 1914, and by 1949 most major universities had established sociology departments. The scope of sociology was broad; it often embraced cultural anthropology, demography, and social work as well. By 1952, however, the discipline had been labeled a bourgeois and unnecessary field and effectively eliminated. Scholars in the field shifted into other disciplines, most often into the new field of national minority studies, occasionally into economics, law, history, or other related fields.

Only in early 1979 did the study of sociology receive official sanction. An institutional base has emerged since then. The Chinese Sociological Association was founded in March 1979, followed immediately by the establishment of the Institute of Sociology within the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Subsequently, many regional sociological associations as well as institutes of sociology were organized. At the present time, sociology departments exist in four universities which include Beijing University, Nankai University in Tianjin, Zhongshan University in Ghangzhou, and Shanghai University.

Sociology in China today can be characterized as having three orientations (Whyte and Pasternak, 1980). The first is empiricism in that truth is derived from facts rather than political dogma. The old argument that Marxism-Leninism-Maoism makes a field like sociology unnecessary has been abandoned. The second is the applied and social problem orientation. Any discipline in China is required to serve the present national priority, namely the modernization of

agriculture, defense, industry, and science and technology (i.e., the four modernizations). Chinese authorities openly acknowledge that China suffers from a number of serious social problems including over-population, juvenile delinquency, unemployment, family and marital conflicts, and housing deficiencies. Since Chinese Marxism does not provide a clear understanding of or solutions to these problems, it is hoped that the emerging sociology will provide methods for analyzing social problems scientifically and thus produce useful information for their solutions. The third orientation is to develop a sociology suited to current Chinese conditions. One must avoid simply importing the "bourgeois" version of sociology from the west.

The study of aging has attracted increasing attention in China. In April 1983 with the approval of the State Council, the China Gerontological Committee was established. Local gerontological committees are beginning to emerge in many provinces and municipalities (Wu, 1984). In Beijing the U.S. Delegation was informed that there is a special interest in the physical fitness and exercise of the elderly. The Chinese Sociological Association has been working with the National Physical Education Committee in developing such programs. The China Gerontological Committee is concerned with the use of leisure time in old age, relationships between the aged and their families, social welfare, and residential facilities for the elderly. In Shanghai, aging is one of the priority areas of the current five-year plan and is expected to be included in the next five-year plan.

There are at least three periodicals specializing in aging. These include, Long Life, Laoren (Old People), and Elderly Chinese published respectively in Tianjin, Gansu Province, and Beijing. All of them came into existence only very recently. The contents of these publications are rather mixed in that professional articles, journalistic reports, social commentary, as well as

popular writings such as self-help tips are included. One gets the impression that these periodicals essentially cater to the elderly in general rather than to gerontological professionals. Nevertheless, many academic journals have been carrying articles related to aging. For instance, Shehui (Society), which is published by the Sociology Department at Shanghai University and has become a very important national sociological journal, regularly publishes gerontological articles. Given the view that sociology is to serve socialist construction and to contribute to the four modernizations, an applied or social-problem approach toward the study of aging has been emphasized.

Characteristics of the Older Population[1]

China has more than one billion people accounting for 22% of the world's population (Banister, 1984). With a per capita gross national product of $281 in 1982 (as compared with $12,820 in the United States in 1981), China ranks in the bottom third of the developing nations (World Bank Atlas, 1983; Jiang, Zhang, and Zhu, 1984). In terms of its age structure, China has a relatively young population. According to its 1982 census China has approximately 50 million people 65 years of age or older which accounts for 4.9% of its total population. If one defines old age as 60 years of age or older, China has an older population of nearly 77 million that is 7.6% of the total population (Xu, 1984).

Based on the 1982 census, the 1981 life expectancy at birth in China is 67.9 years. At 65 life expectancy is estimated to be 13.6 years. At birth, females are expected to outlive males by 2.9 years. With a median age at death of 67.5 years, the three leading causes of death are heart disease,

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[1]Much of the statistics included in this section came from the 1982 Chinese National Census compiled by Xu Qing (1984).

strokes, and cancer, reflecting a pattern of mortalities similar to that of an aging population. This pattern also represents a dramatic shift in causes of death during the past three decades. Respiratory disease, infectious disease, and tuberculosis were the three leading causes of death in 1957 (Jiang, Zhang, and Zhu, 1984).

In terms of the geographical distribution, coastal provinces and cities tend to have a higher concentration of older people (i.e., 60 plus population accounts for 8% or more of the total population versus a national average of 7.6%). Nationally, the 60 and plus population is rather evenly distributed in rural areas (7.8%), cities (7.6%), and towns (6.5%).

In reference to the age composition, those 70 years of age or older account for 36.5% of the older population (60 and over) in China while the 80-plus category constitutes only 6.6%. These proportions are lower than their counterparts in the more developed countries such as Sweden, Japan, and the United States. However, they are relatively high among the developing countries. Among those 60 years of age and over, the sex ratio is 87 which is higher than those in the more developed countries but is lower than other developing countries such as India and Singapore.

In China, old people exhibit a profile of marital statuses similar to those in other countries. Specifically, some 70% of older men are married and about 25% are widowed. Only 2.5% of old men are never married, and 1.5% of them are divorced. For older women, some 40% of them are married while nearly 60% are widowed. Only .3% of older women are never married and less than .5% of them are divorced. In comparison with developed countries, China has much lower rates of singlehood and divorce.

The Chinese elderly generally have very little education. Nearly 80% of

the aged are illiterate or semi-illiterate. This proportion is more than twice as much as that for the population 15 years of age or older (i.e., 34.5%). Only some 5% of the elderly have an educational background equivalent to junior high school or more. There are substantial gender and urban vs. rural differences in educational background. While 61% of elderly men are illiterate or semi-illiterate, over 95% of older women belong to the same category. In addition, rural areas exhibit a rate of illiteracy or semi-illiteracy of 82% which is much higher than its urban counterpart (64%).

In China, the retirement age is 60 for men and 55 for women. Using this definition of the older population, the labor force participation rate of older persons is 26%. In 1982, 43% of the men 60 years of age or over were still in the labor force whereas only 16% of women 55 years of age or older were. This pattern of gender difference may be a reflection of sex roles in China. More discussion of this point will be made later in this paper.

Population Aging

With a relatively high fertility and a low mortality rate during most of the three and one-half decades since 1949, China has been a "young" population. The death rate declined from 25.5 deaths per 1,000 people in 1953 to 7.3 per 1,000 in 1981. This decline was interrupted by an increase in the death rate reaching 38.8 deaths per 1,000 during the food crisis years of 1958-1961 (Coale, 1984). On the other hand, between 1950 and 1982 the birth rate fell by 50%. This decline was not smooth or steady in that it sharply fluctuated with changes in political upheavals and birth control programs.

In 1950 the rate was 41.3 births per 1,000 people, a level that had prevailed for two decades. As a result of the Great Leap Forward in 1958-1959

and the famine of 1960-1961, the birth rate fell to around 25 per 1,000 in 1959-1961. During the Cultural Revolution of the 1960's, birth planning was abandoned. Consequently, the birth rate rose rapidly to 39 per 1,000 in one year. The full effect of organized population control began to be felt in the 1970's. The birth planning campaign was launched with the slogan "Later, Longer, Fewer" in 1971. It was succeeded in 1979 by an even more restrictive program: the one-child campaign. By 1980 the birth rate had decreased to 18.5 per 1,000. According to the 1982 census, there has been a recent increase in birth rate to 21.1 per 1,000 population. The consequences of such a substantial decline in fertility have been a subject of intense examination.

According to the Chinese government, the largest population China can support is 1.2 billion, or 200 million more than its 1982 population. Projections concerning the effect of an immediate decrease in birth rate to a level commensurate with an ultimate constant population of 1.2 billion, reveal two major implications. First, in the middle of the 21st century, China will have a substantially older population. For instance, in 1980 Chinese elderly (60 years of age or older) accounted for some 8% of the total population. This proportion is projected to grow to 11% in the year 2000 and to 20% in 2025 (Wu, 1983). The fraction of retirees would begin to increase sharply after 2005. By 2040, when the last of the cohorts born between 1960 and 1979 reach 60 and retire, the retiree to worker ratio would reach the highest level: 32 retirees for every 100 workers. In contrast, in 1980 the ratio was 9 retirees per 100 workers (Keyfitz, 1984). The projected population aging would undoubtedly entail a substantial burden for old age support. This is further exacerbated by the fact that old age support would compete for much needed resources for economic development in China.

The second implication concerns the impact of reduced fertility on Chinese

families which in turn would have profound ramifications for old age support. If a constant population of 1.2 billion as targeted by the Chinese government is to be achieved, Chinese married couples must average fewer than two children for much of the 1990's, a figure less than that in most developed countries (Coale, 1981; Keyfitz, 1984). As a result of the one-child family policy, the absence of siblings, the subsequent loss of in-laws, uncles, aunts, and the thinning out of extended consanguineous relationships would remove a large number of branches from the family tree. This reduced average family size is most likely to weaken the family network which has been the backbone of old age support in China.

Population aging and its consequences have received some attention from our Chinese colleagues, although the control of population growth is clearly the major concern. In a meeting with members of Beijing University's Sociology Department, it was pointed out by the U.S. Delegation that the very success of the one-child family policy will accelerate the process of population aging in China. Given the reduced family size, old age support in the future can be a serious social problem.

The close linkage between birth control and old age support is further illustrated by a study of rural women who had just had abortions. It was found that most of them felt that the abortion was unjustified. Major reasons cited for this view were the needs for physical labor and old age support. The situation is especially difficult for couples with a daughter as the only child. In the countryside, a daughter typically leaves her parental home at marriage and becomes part of the labor force of her husband's family. A married daughter bears no formal obligation for supporting her parents in old age. With the one-child policy, one-half of all parents in rural China face the prospect of no support in old age. More discussion regarding the relationship between birth control and old age support will be presented later.

Old Age Support in Rural Areas

Old age support in China derives from two major sources: employment and family. One should note that old age support cannot be adequately addressed without taking into account the sharp disparities in financial well-being between rural and urban residents. These inequalities are largely a result of the vast difference in government responsibility for worker salaries and benefits. As observed by Davis-Friedmann (1983), the average return for ten hours of agricultural labor rarely exceeds 50% of the wage for an eight-hour shift in a factory or store. Furthermore, the average income in urban areas is estimated to be three times as high as its rural counterpart (Keyfitz, 1984). As early as 1951 the National Labor Insurance Regulations provided most urban workers with free medical care, disability pay, and pensions, whereas farm workers were explicitly excluded from this legislation. Consequently, old age support should be treated separately for urban and rural residents.

In rural China the predominant mode of support for the elderly is a combination of marginal employment and dependence on married sons (Davis-Friedmann, 1983). Elderly men often continue to work even into their seventies. They generally take auxiliary jobs such as orchard watchman, stockmen, and scavengers of dung and manure. In contrast, elderly women usually leave their full-time job completely after the birth of their first grandchild and devote their energies to household work. This partially accounts for the low labor force participation rate for older women. At home, the elderly are responsible for child rearing, cooking, and tending domestic animals. Although elderly men tend the vegetable garden and collect firewood, elderly women generally assume the bulk of household chores.

The introduction of the production responsibility system has encouraged the cultivation of small private plots and raising of private livestock. Produce from such enterprises is sold in the free markets that have emerged in the cities, towns, and larger villages. The aged are mainly responsible for the private growing of vegetables and tending of livestock, and they often become vendors in the free markets. As a result, they contribute substantially to household income and the improvement of the standard of living in rural areas.

For the majority of old people in rural China, support is the responsibility of the family, not of the collective or the state (Parish and Whyte, 1978). According to the Marriage Law, children have the duty to support and assist their aged parents. After the introduction of collective farming in the early 1950's, people were told that they could rely on the collective for the "five guarantees," including food, clothing, medical care, housing, and burial expenses. However, it soon became apparent that such guarantees were to apply only to old people who had no grown sons to support them. No general state-funded old-age pension program comparable to that enjoyed by urban workers is available to rural residents.

The family's role in providing old age support is born out by findings from a survey of 2,022 rural elderly people in Henan Province (Liu, 1983). In 1982, 71% of the respondents lived with and were supported by their sons, and another 20%, though living by themselves, were also supported by their grown sons. Only 3% of the respondents were depending on their daughters and 6% were relying on the "five-guarantees." As noted by Liu (1983), the 6% figure is inflated due to the fact that villages with ample old age support programs were over sampled. Given such a pattern of old age support, one can certainly understand the traditional practices of raising children to guard against old age and of valuing males while slighting females. This reality is vividly

illustrated by the often posed question "Without a son, how are these people to survive?"

In recent years, pension systems have been introduced in rural China. Recent research undertaken by the Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences provided many insights concerning pension systems in the rural area around Tianjin City. In general, affluent communes are more likely to provide pensions. Among the 3,000 production brigades in Tianjin area, 120 provided pensions in 1979. In 1980, more than 200 brigades did so. These brigades all had an average per capita income of over 200 yuan (U.S. $100) per year excluding the yearly sharing of food and other things produced in the commune. In contrast, the average income per capita in the Tianjin area was 150 yuan per year. Although there are 700 production brigades in the Tianjin area which had an average annual per capita income of 200 yuan or more, only 26% of them were providing old age pensions. Eligibility for pensions in a production brigade generally depends on age and seniority. Long time workers and officials get higher pension ranges from 17 yuan to 22 yuan per month. One should note that since 1979, many profound changes have taken place. For instance, the implementation of the production responsibility system in the rural areas has resulted in a substantial increase in income.

As suggested previously, there is a close linkage between having many children, especially sons, and support in old age. Although some communes and production brigades are providing pensions, in most rural areas old age support is still the responsibility of the family. This system is clearly in conflict with the national goals of family planning. To resolve such a conflict, the issue of old age support needs to be addressed. According to the study done by the Tianjin Academy of Sciences, women in communes with pensions are more

likely to support family planning than those in communes where no pensions are available. Another example would be the case of urban residents who generally work for state-run enterprises and are entitled to pensions. Not surprisingly, family planning has been more successful in urban areas. Consequently, a solution to old age support was viewed as essential in achieving the control of population growth. Old age insurance has been suggested as a pragmatic first step toward this direction.

Old Age Support in Urban Areas

An important impetus for much research on aging is the sharp increase in the proportion of retired urban residents in the major cities. Shanghai City, for example, is estimated to have almost 1.1 million retired workers, up from .48 million in 1978, with the result that the ratio of retired to employed workers in the city is more than three times the national average. This sharp upturn in the proportion of retired persons in the cities is due to several factors. Strict limits on migration into the large cities has the effect of increasing the proportion of old people, since migrants are typically young people.

Compulsory retirement laws are also having an impact. Male factory workers and cadres retire at age 60. The retirement age for their female counterparts is 55. Intellectuals may continue to work until age 65. The large majority of the urban labor force is retired by age 60. As a result, the number of retirees is increased substantially by including not only those 65 years of age and over, but also those between 60 and 64. As observed by Goldstein and Goldstein (1984), in the cities and towns males aged 60-64 years increase the total population of retired men by 65%. For women, the addition of the 55-64 age group more than doubles the number of aged females.

There is also an explosion of young retirees (in their 50s) as a result of the dingti system, in which adult children are guaranteed jobs in their parents' place of work if the parent retires. With about 4 million young people entering labor force ages annually, there is a labor surplus in the urban areas. Most young now expect to wait a full year after graduating from secondary school before being assigned a job (Goldstein and Goldstein, 1984). This special inducement to early retirement was thought to be a useful means of dealing with unemployment among young adults.

The dingti system is sometimes combined with another option that helps to retain the work contributions of particularly well-qualified parents. This is an income subsidy or income supplement (bucha) system that permits the retired older worker to work at another enterprise. Under this system, the worker collects his retirement pension (usually 75-85% of his original salary) from his former workplace, while the new work unit pays him an additional 15-25% to compensate for the income loss when he took early retirement under the dingti system to assist a son or daughter in securing employment (Zhao, 1983, p.21). However, according to some observers, the dingti system may be phased out in the next few years.

Pension programs are much better developed in urban areas. In the state sector, namely government administration and industries, where 80% of the urban workers are employed, a minimum age of 50 for women and 60 for men is required to be eligible for pensions. Furthermore, one needs to have at least 10 years' employment in the state sector to collect a pension. Pensions range from 60% to 100% of a worker's last wage depending on length of service and prior participation in revolutionary work. In addition to the pension payment, medical insurance benefits and other supplements received before retirement are included (Whyte and Parish, 1984). In collective enterprises

including commerce and consumer services, pensions are less generous. They require more years of continuous employment and replace a lower percentage (i.e., 40 to 60%) of the last wage. Moreover, it should be noted that there is great variation in pension systems among collective enterprises. Outside the major cities, collective enterprise pensions can be rare indeed as of most of the other social benefits (Parish, 1985). Since 1979, as a solution to the increasingly serious problem of unemployment, private enterprises have been allowed to exist. Given that private enterprises are such a recent phenomenon, it is reasonable to assume pensions are not yet available to their employees.

Out of the 18 million persons of retirement age (males aged 60 and over; and females aged 55 and over) in urban areas, about 8 million or only some 45% received pensions in 1981 (Goldstein and Goldstein, 1984). Persons with no pensions are those who either left the labor force before a pension system was instituted at their work units or those having worked for fewer than the 10 years required to be eligible for a pension. In addition, there are many people, mainly women, who never were members of the labor force. As mandated by the law, these older people are to be cared for by their children. Only the childless aged become the state's responsibility.

The majority of old people in urban areas live in extended households with a grown child, usually a son. Acceptance of the obligation to support aged parents seems virtually universal. Strong feelings of respect and mutual obligation remain to bind generations together. As a result, very few old people end up in old-age homes. It should be noted older people often make important contributions, economic as well as noneconomic, to the household. Moreover, there is an increasing bilineal emphasis in terms of old age support in urban China (Whyte and Parish, 1984). Thus, daughters as well as sons

share the obligation to help support their aging parents. As a result, both daughters and sons are included in the inheritance of family property.

Non-family Provision for the Elderly

Older people who cannot work or have no kin to care for them are the responsibility of the state. These childless aged people are provided "five guarantees" which include food, clothing, housing, medical care, and burial expenses. According to a recent census of the rural five-guarantee households, there are 2.65 million such elderly people ("One Hundred Forty Thousand", 1984). Self-sufficiency and community volunteerism are emphasized in supporting the childless aged. Many childless elderly supplement the subsistence level welfare payments by growing cash crops, engaging in small-scale enterprise, and developing special personal relationships with young people. When assistance with household chores or nursing care is needed, usually some informal arrangements are made. For example, a neighbor or retired worker in the vicinity may be assigned to provide such services (Davis-Friedmann, 1983). In the cities, most childless aged people live in the community. Neighborhood resident committees and neighbors are responsible for providing various services or support. The state also provides a living allowance which amounts to an average of 20 yuan per month. In the countryside, the provision of five-guarantees is the responsibility of the production brigade or commune (Tau, 1984).

Given the strong emphases on family support, self-sufficiency, and community volunteerism, institutionalized care is reserved as the last resort. Nationally only 167,000 elderly people or .33% of the 65-and-plus population were institutionalized in 1984. In the urban areas, there were 684 social welfare homes caring for some 22,000 elderly people (Tau, 1984). In the rural areas, there were 11,000 homes for the aged which cared for some 147,000 older people ("One

Hundred Forty Thousand", 1984). Another factor accounting for such a low rate of institutionalization is the relatively young age composition of the elderly population. In China, the proportions of population in the 75-79 and 80-and-plus age groups are 11.2% and 6.6% respectively (Xu, 1984). Their counterparts in the U.S. are 12.5% (75-79 age group) and 14.9% (80-and-plus age group).

The U.S. Delegation had the opportunity in Shanghai to meet some of these "orphaned elderly" men and women, at the First Welfare Home for the Aged. This is a state-run institution that was established five years ago. It is undoubtedly the highest quality home for the aged in the city, since the residents pay for their stay and for the food they consume, while the four other homes for the aged in Shanghai are for elderly persons who cannot contribute to their own maintenance and sustenance. In the home we visited, the residents are all parents without children, not because they were childless but because their children were now deceased, many as a result of their revolutionary participation. The residents were a diverse group, including professors, physicians, cadres, teachers, and workers. This home is in the process of expansion, from its current capacity of 100 to an anticipated occupancy of 400. The age range of the residents was from 60 to 102, with an average of 75. Ten percent were ambulatory; 40% semi-ambulatory, and 50% non-ambulatory, of whom 10% were bedridden. The criteria for admission include being a resident of Shanghai, having no spouse and no children, and being able to afford the cost. All residents were pensioners.

To care for the 100 residents, there is a full-time staff of 75 people, including two physicians, three nurses, 28 nursing aides, a number of cooks (one per 25 residents) and administrative staff. The clinic has contact with several large hospitals in the district which have geriatric specialists on their staffs. The chief administrator explained at some length that the service orientation taught to the nursing staff was built upon the traditional

Chinese respect for the old. The average monthly cost was said to be five yuan per person, in addition to the daily cost of food. The dining room we visited had a list of food being served that day, with the per serving price attached to each, so that the residents could make selections appropriate to the amount of money their pensions allowed them to devote to food. It is our understanding that the home is also subsidized by the municipal government.

Concerns for the Future

Given the recent decline in fertility, China will have a substantially older population in the middle of the 21st century. A primary policy concern is to provide adequate old age support in the years to come. In China, it is generally recognized that population will not become a critical problem until the 2020's (Song et al., 1982). Presently, because of the small proportion of the older population, the needs of China's aged are being met by family initiatives and to some extent by state pensions. With the projected sharp increase in the number and proportion of old people and the decrease in average family size, the present system of old age support will be under severe strain. For instance, providing pensions to retired cadres and workers has become an increasingly heavy burden. Currently, there are over 10 million retirees in China. The annual expenditures for pensions exceeds 7 billion yuan. The number of new retirees is estimated to be 1.2 million each year adding to the pension expenditure by 700 million yuan (Tau, 1984). Each state-run or collective enterprise is responsible for providing pensions and fringe benefits to its retirees. In many units, the ratio of current workers to retirees has reached the point that the financial integrity of the enterprise is threatened.

New policy options must be seriously considered. One such option is to raise the retirement age (Keyfitz, 1984; Sheppard and Rix, 1977). If the

retirement age is raised sufficiently, a manageable old age dependency ratio can be maintained even though the average age of the population will have risen considerably. Such a projection was undertaken by Keyfitz (1984). Given the current retirement age of 60 and assuming 16.7 million births per year, the ratio of retirees to workers was nine to 100 in 1980. This ratio can be maintained by raising the age of retirement of 62 in 2000, t o 67 in 2020 and to a maximum of 73 in 2040. Thereafter, the retirement age could be slowly lowered.

There certainly would be objections to raising the retirement age. The major concern would be the adverse effect on upward mobility for the young. The aged would be perceived as holding on to the good jobs. This can be very divisive and may generate a lot of intergenerational conflicts. This is especially true in view of the current problem of unemployment among young people born in the 1960s. However, one should note that the unemployment problem is likely to ease in the 1990s because the shrinking cohorts from the 1970's will cause a sharp drop in the number of individuals entering the labor force at age 18. Moreover, as the economy expands, more surplus labor can be absorbed.

Another policy option worth considering is the possibility of changing the traditional view that sons rather than daughters have to support elderly parents.[2] Thus, even with the one-child policy, there will be support for parents without sons. Conceivably, economic incentives can be provided to encourage this reform. For instance, daughters can be given equal shares of inheritance as sons in return for the responsibility of supporting their parents. Given that the party and government are deeply penetrated into Chinese society, they are capable of mobilizing, educating, and motivating the masses for such a reform. Indeed,

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[2]I am indebted to Alice Rossi for suggesting this policy option.

an increasingly bilineal emphasis in old age support in urban China has already been observed (Whyte and Parish, 1984).

As a result of population aging, the demand for long-term care in China is expected to increase substantially. Currently, the majority of such care is provided by the family or volunteers in the community. In view of the increasing proportions of the aged and the old-old (i.e., 80 and plus) such a system is unlikely to meet the need for long-term care in the future. Alternative mechanisms for delivering long-term care, institutionalized as well as noninstitutionalized, need to be explored.

Population aging is a by-product of demographic transition which is the long term reduction in the mortality and fertility of a population. This phenomenon often coincides with other processes such as urbanization and economic development. For instance, a substantial transformation of the occupational structure is inevitable as the economy modernizes. Today, China is more than 80% rural with most of its labor force engaged in agricultural manual labor. With further economic development, the demand for such labor will be reduced considerably. One of the major problems faced by the Chinese government is finding employment for young people born in the 1960's who are entering the labor force in large numbers. Furthermore, the pace of urbanization will accelerate. This would imply an urban population of six or seven hundred million some time in the next century (Coale, 1981). Public policies must accommodate for these developments. More importantly, the interaction between aging-related policies and those addressing other concerns must be scrutinized carefully. Undoubtedly. many difficult choices will be involved.

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THE REFORM OF CHINA'S SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM FOR THE ELDERLY

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A central part of China's two thousand-year-old tradition is a strong family structure and a built-in respect for the elderly. This meant that the elderly in Old China were always supported by and often even surrounded by their children, grandchildren, and other relatives. In the People's Republic of China, the constitution specifically states that children have the obligation to provide support to their parents. Those who fail or refuse to do so may, in serious cases, be subject to criminal penalties.

Ancient China had similar laws. Recently, archeologists in Wuwei County, Gansu Province, found an imperial decree carved on bamboo sticks dated from the West Han dynasty (206 B.C. to 25 B.C.). According to this document, people over 70 years of age were to be given walking sticks with a turtle dove engraved on the handle. This imperial symbol entitled them to special privileges, including the social status of an official with a yearly allowance of 600 dan of rice, (approximately 30,000 kilograms) and excuse from kneeling before higher officers. If the elderly were merchants, they would be free from further taxes. Any insult to such a person was considered an insult to the Emperor and would be punished accordingly.

Respect for the aged is still one of the most important values in New China. Today we naturally could not possibly afford to grant similar privileges to old people. Two thousand years ago, the life expectancy must have been much shorter, while today people can expect to live till they are 68. With a population of over one billion, the total number of the aged population (60 and over) has reached 76 million. Yet, the population is

also very young, the average age being 26 in 1983. These figures mean that China has the largest pool of the aged under one government, and the rate of increase may be the quickest. Between the years 1950 and 2025, the population of China will increase 2.6 times, but the number of the aged will increase 6.7 times.

Chinese leaders realize that the problems of aging will become increasingly important in China. To address these problems, the National Committee of Aging Problems was set up in 1982. It consists of representatives from 14 government organizations and 7 voluntary organizations. Its mandate is broad, including research into aging issues and the planning, coordination and supervision of the effort to address the problems of aging. Another organization is the Chinese Gerontology Society, which is still in its preparatory stage.

Let us first consider the urban working population. According to the Labor Insurance Regulation, the retirement age for men is 60, and that of women is 55. Those who retire after less than 20 years of work receive 60-70% of their final pay, while those who have worked more than 20 years receive 75-90%. Those who made special contributions before retirement get an additional 5-15% to their pensions. Retirees also enjoy free medical care and other benefits. All these payments, including pensions, medical insurance and subsidies, are paid by the government and not by the workers themselves. By the end of 1983, the total number retirees from public enterprises had reached 10 million. Another 3 million workers retired from collective enterprises. This makes the total number of urban retirees 13 million. At present, 1.5 million workers retire every year.

In October 1984, the government published its decisions on reform of the economic structure as an important aspect of the modernization program.

Reform of the pension system is still under consideration. One of the principles of the reformed pension system will be to include the entire working population, whether in public, collective or private enterprises. Another principle will be to tie the pension system to the level of development of the economy. From the experiences of the welfare programs of developed countries, we have learned that an excessively high cost of the social insurance program will make an undesirable impact on the national economy.

Reforms in the system of retirement include three main ideas: First is to broaden the category of people to be covered by the pension system. At present, social insurance is limited to workers in the urban setting, covering those in public and old collective enterprises. Workers in the newly organized collective enterprises (about a million workers) have become part of the new insurance system managed by the Social Insurance Services companies. Left uncovered are the two million workers in private enterprises, another million contract workers (those hired by enterprises for a limited period of time) and the peasant masses in rural areas. These latter groups should also enjoy a certain protection, though under different arrangements, during this period of rising productivity and economic growth.

Among the peasant population, which makes up 75% of the total population, there are 90 million retirees. This group presents the most difficult problem for China. Under the present system of the "Five Guarantees," guarantee of food, clothing, housing, medical care and burial expenses, only those elderly who have no families are covered. This leaves the majority of the rural retirees to rely on their sons and daughters for support. In the long run, most of us in China think that a social security system should be built in for the rural retirees, now that economic reforms are well under way.

Even now, some of the developed villages are beginning to install some insurance systems.

A second part of the reform in the insurance system is equalizing the cost of retirement pensions for different districts and enterprises. Before such efforts began, pension expenses in Shanghai were 22% of the total wages, those of Beijing equaled 8-9%, and in some provinces of north-western China, pension expenses were 5-7% of the total wages. The government plans to equalize pension payments to approximately 10% of the total wages.

Third, opinions vary as to who should bear the costs of the pension system. A majority opinion is in favor of a small contribution from the workers, say 3% of their wages. This is a small percentage which would not impose a heavy burden on the working population but would bring other benefits. For example, it would change people's attitude that they could rely on the government for everything. Workers would become more concerned about the whole social security system, and learn more about the democratic management of money. Because opinions are still varied on this question, no final policy decisions have been made.

There are other aspects of the aging problem which are undergoing further discussion and which should be dealt with.

1. <u>In what ways can the aged contribute to society?</u>

With improvements in public health and increased life expectancy, most of China's aged can continue to function and make contributions to the modernization process. The government should encourage those who are experienced and knowledgeable to be engaged in some work. The traditional view in China regards the elderly as those who inherit, develop, and spread its material and spiritual civilization. Their experience is rich and their

understanding of society is profound. In the course of human progress they provide needed continuity. Furthermore, the elderly make up a labor resource which costs little to society and brings quick results. If we can effectively organize this portion of our human resources, we not only meet a labor requirement but also meet the individual needs of the elderly for a meaningful life. There is a popular saying in China: "Don't just give time to the life of the aged, but give life to their time."

The elderly are rich in knowledge, ability and interests. Retirement is a good opportunity for them to concentrate their efforts and continue to develop their specialties and interests. In the past two years, many cities' governments in China have organized different aassociations of the elderly. Among these are the following:

- Some have become or will be advisors to factories and enterprises, supplying information on science and technology.
- Some are starting to write books or translate different kinds of specialized material.
- Some promote scholarly exchange, cultivate young talent, or continue to work on their own projects.
- Some enter different kinds of social activities, help with tutorial work, assist with public security, facilitate public transportation, supervise public hygiene, mediate in family or neighborhood disputes.
- Some join in performances, athletic, recreational or cultural activities, enliven neighborhoods, and join in competitions.
- Some help in various kind of rural work, such as manage enterprises, business activities, or develop service industries. To be able to make contributions to society should be the greatest fulfillment for the elderly.

- An innovative institution is a Tientsin program in which retired engineers teach evening classes. These engineers are in great demand; factories compete to invite them to organize classes.

2. How can the aged be encouraged to learn more?

To follow the pace of modernization, the aged must continue learning. A good example is a university in Shandong set up exclusively for the aged.

3. How can the aged get more adequate medical care? How can their general health level be raised?

There are many traditional exercises and medical care programs available to the aged. The elderly can be encouraged to learn them and put them to frequent use. Most obvious is of course the tai ji quan, which many elderly can be seen practicing early every morning. There are variations of this kind of exercise, some of which are not too vigorous and therefore suitable. There are also traditional herbs which are known to build up one's body without side effects. Many elderly use them when they are sick to become healthy.

4. What types of activities can be devised to make the life of the aged more enjoyable?

At present, many clubs and sports activities are being organized for the elderly. These are gaining greater and greater popularity. The district culture centers in many cities are the natural locations for these activities. In Shanghai, for example, a traditional art and brush calligraphy program was organized in the fall of 1983 in response to popular request from some leisure-time artist among the elderly. It is a free activity, drawing enthusiasts from a large geographic area. These artists gather to paint or do brush writing extemporaneously, to exchange opinions on their own art work, and to sponsor seminar discussions on the history of Chinese art and calligraphy.

A kind of spontaneously organized activity takes place in parks, where in certain corners or areas, groups of amateur opera singers will gather on any sunny day, summer or winter. These groups include musicians on traditional instruments which accompany opera singers. The only equipment they bring, other than their instruments, are a few simple benches, some thermos bottles of hot water for tea, a few cups, and sometimes a blackboard to record arrival of participants who then take turns singing for their own and the group's enjoyment. Such groups have been written about in Beijing and in Shanghai. Perhaps by now, similar groups are mushrooming in different locations and carrying on different activities.

China wants to independently solve the problems associated with her aging population, with minimum direct assistance from others, but with their experience as a guide. We especially want to accomplish this task within the spirit of our tradition. We value ideas and suggestions from abroad, as well as their experiences which should help us forecast what is likely to happen in the future.

During my half year at Brandeis University, I have had numerous discussions with professors and students at the Heller School of Social Welfare on ways of coordinating efforts of government, community, and family in efforts of solving problems associated with aging. Some people feel that during the process of modernization, the government should take more responsibility for the well-being of the elderly. Their forecast is that what happened in the Western world will be repeated in China. A contrasting opinion is that the role of the family and community should continue to be encouraged. Not to do so would mean a great loss to the elderly. This group believes that developed countries like the U.S. have gone too far in a direction away from family and community support to reverse the trend. China, on the other hand,

is at the starting point of great changes, and has the option of keeping some traditional ways. A third group wants to do both: keep the traditions as well as adopt the Western method of increasing the government role. One of the suggestions is for the government to give subsidies to persons who take care of their parents. In this way, government support strengthens the family structure.

China, the most populous country in the world with the largest number of elderly, is trying to systematically deal with problems of an aging population. Some of the efforts have to be trial and error in nature. Although we have the benefit from others' experience, every country has its own cultural tradition and concrete conditions. What China will do in the next few years will be in part a giant experiment which the world will watch with great interest. The lessons learned will hopefully be of use to other parts of the world.

DEVELOPING RESEARCH ON AGING IN CHINA*

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Sociology of aging has increasingly aroused extensive interest and attention among contemporary social scientists. The Institute of Sociology in China has set up a research group for this particular issue, and the Institute of Gerontology in Shanghai has been established as well. China also sent a delegation to participate in the 1982 United Nations Conference on the Aged in Vienna. This paper advocates the need for more research on the aged in China.

The Elderly: A Social Problem

Aging has become a serious social problem, so it is very important to develop research on the subject. As a matter of fact, everyone has at least some contact with the elderly throughout their lives, and people themselves also have to follow the natural law of moving from young to old. The aged still play an important role in social and family life. Moreover, as the old population has increased dramatically in the world, it makes this issue a more serious one.

What is the definition for elderly? Generally speaking, age 60 is the criterion for distinguishing the elderly. Countries in which the old population accounts for over 10% of its total population are called "aged countries". According to this definition, more and more developed countries have become "aged countries" since the 1950's. Thus the number of aged

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countries has been increasing. Early in this century, the average life-span of people in developed countries was about in their 50's, while for those people in the colonies it was only in their 20's. The most recent survey shows that the aged (i.e., 60 or over) account for 12% of the total population in the world. And with the decreasing fertility rate and improved medical techniques, the proportion of the aged will still increase. It is estimated that by the end of this century, older populations will amount to five hundred and eighty million. Yet not only are there more old populations, but old populations are getting older as well.

In China, the average life-span for males was 66.95 years, and 69.55 years for females. In this sense, China might have been classified as one of the "aged countries" in the world. According to the latest census in China, the older population accounts for 8% of the entire population, and the proportion has even increased in the last two years. It is expected that with the movement of socialist construction, the rise of the living standard, the establishment of social welfare, the improvement of medical care, and the development of the new socialist mood of respecting and providing for the elderly, the life-span of the population will be longer than ever. In addition, because of the birth control policy and the decrease in fertility, the proportion of the aged in the entire population will increase dramatically. It is estimated that the proportion of the older population in China will amount to more than 20% of the whole population by the years 2020 and 2030.

What makes the proportion of the older population in China increase so fast is not only due to the rise of the living standard or the improvement of medical care. It is also a reflection of the superiority of the socialist system. The Chinese have been well known for their tradition of having

respect for the elderly; the present socialist system adds new elements into such a tradition. However, from the standpoint of the society as a whole, the increase of the older population means there are more people who were once producers becoming consumers. That will cause a lot of new problems to families and society. Thus, it is urgent for us to be able to understand and solve these problems.

There are many problems related to aging which can be roughly categorized into two aspects: physical and social. The physical aspect mainly involves the issues of how to keep healthy and prolong one's life span. Physical, medical and biological scientists have been trying to deal with these problems. On the other hand, the social aspects of aging concern matters like how to reincorporate the elderly into a useful role in society, help them continue to develop themselves, their status, their roles and relationship in family settings, help them deal with psychological changes experienced due to the aging process, and help them meet their material and spiritual needs. Social scientists are especially interested in these kinds of problems and have been dedicated in their research with the hope that they may find a way to resolve them. However, these two aspects are independent from each other, but they are also inter-related. For example, as to how to keep healthy and prolonging life span, it involves not only medical and social aspects but psychological and environmental elements as well. As a result, it needs to be studied comprehensively.

Many countries in the world now have recognized the importance of the research on aging. In the U.S., the first Institute of Gerontology was set up in 1974, and there are courses in gerontology being offered in 29 colleges and universities throughout the country. In Britain there are also some research

organizations focusing on the study of aging. In Japan there is a comprehensive gerontology institute set up in Tokyo. In China the first national conference of gerontology and medical science for the elderly was established in 1964. Recently, the Chinese Committee of the United Nations Conference for the Aged has been officially set up; and development of the research on aging medical science, aging psychology and aging sociology has shown that the role of the elderly in society has gained extensive attention. As a matter of fact, more and more people are concerned about this critical issue, and it is also believed that some encouraging progress will be accomplished in the near future.

The Important Role and Characteristics of the Elderly

The reason why we should pay great attention to the research of the elderly is not only because the old population has been substantially increased, but also because the aged have their own unique characteristics which make their roles in this society more important. In order to develop the elderly's potential and make their lives more meaningful, we have to first understand them.

In China, the elderly have devoted themselves to the society both physically and intellectually. However, the broad and profound knowledge which they obtained from their previous accumulated experiences is invaluable and could still serve the Four Modernizations. Some people argue that the elderly are of no use at all, because of the fact that seniors not only age physically, but mentally as well. When people get older, their intelligence, physical strength and memory wane. This is a natural phenomenon, but according to numerous experiments conducted by psychologists, it was discovered that elderly people below 70 years of age maintain 87% of their mental faculty and their ability of judgement. Some of them have even shown an increase in creative

power due to their previous experiences and broad common sense. For example, 10% or 100,000 of the retirees in Shanghai have re-entered the labor force and now continue to serve the Socialist Construction with their broad and profound knowledge and skill. Seventy thousand of them remain in Shanghai, the other thirty thousand have left to work in other parts of the country. In Beijing there is a senior citizen aged 74 who passed the qualifying exam for advanced education studying by himself and also obtained honor, the "Diligent Study Award". There is an old saying in China: "The old horse knows the road", thus we should encourage the elderly to continue to serve society with their accumulated wisdom and previous experiences.

In China, the elderly have a very important role in the family setting. As we all know, human beings are gregarious in nature and cannot live without groups. Each member within a group is somewhat related to another by certain relationships. There are many types of groups such as families or social groups. The case of China is a particular one in that most of the old generations are living in the same family setting as the young generations. As a result, knowing how to properly handle the relationships between the elderly and their children is crucial in order to maintain harmony and happiness in the family.

In order to improve the family relationships between the young and the old, we should have some comprehensive understanding about the role of the elderly. The elderly still maintain some family functions such as helping to raise the children, cleaning the house, soothing family members' grief, and even providing financial aid to the younger generation. Thus, the old saying "The aged, though old, are treasures" does make some sense in this respect. However, the general trend of the family structure is changing in a way that

the young generation is more likely to live separated from the aged. According to a survey which sampled 1071 young people aged 15-20 in Beijing, 89.32% of them indicated that they perfer nuclear families. The reasons for this phenomenon are too complicated to discuss here. But the main thing is that people seem to downgrade the role of the elderly, and perceive the aged as useless and even as a burden on the family.

In order to properly handle the family relationships between the elderly and the children, one should also identify the biological and psychological characteristics of the aged. It is said that people's personalities start to change when they get to a certain age (e.g., 65 Or over). Some elderly people begin to act like children, demanding, greedy and self-centered. Some of their responses slow down and tend to interrupt conversations, or ask irrelevant questions all the time. That's what we call rejuvenated. The reason for this phenomenon is that the elderly's brain structure has been changing and mental activities have been degenerating, too. These syndromes are less commonly found in males and those who are better educated. Aside from such biological characteristics, the aged often feel left out as a result of a lack of communications with society. Therefore, the aged not only need to be physically cared for, but also need attention and love. It is also very crucial to keep the moral standard up which may in turn improve the status of the elderly in the family setting. For centuries the ruling class has tried to maintain the stability of the family with moral values and ethical norms based on a certain economic infrastructure which in turn maintain the ruler's authority and power. Since China has moved from semi-fedual and semi-colonial society to a socialist country, it bears both the new things and the remnants of the old tradition. In dealing with the aging as a social problem,

there are three ethical issues which are intertwined with each other. First is the feudalist ethics: filial piety. What is filial piety? Mencius once asked Confucius this question, and Confucius said: "Filial piety means obedience, namely, children must be absolutely obedient to their parents." The idea that parents are never wrong means that parents have absolute rights over their children. The children should follow their parent's will, regardless of whether they like it or not. The second one is the capitalistic ethics, which is based on the self-centered ideology. This problem is similar to what Balzac described in his book "Le Pere de Goriot" that turns family relationships into business relationships. The third is the socialist ethics which advocates collectivism. Family members share a comrade-like relationship, thus respecting, supporting and taking care of the elderly who become the responsibility of the children. Since socialist ethics are not like the traditional filial piety, nor the capitalistic ideology, the question is then how to integrate them into the best system that will include all the good aspects of each one of the ethics, so as to make the lives of the elderly more meaningful.

Problems Remained To Be Solved

1. Elderly Support

Most of the aged people are having a happy and harmonious life in China, yet there are still some who are being ill-treated, or receive no respect from young people. According to a survey in Shanghai regarding the family situation where children and the old generation live together, it was found that if the aged have no income or are in a poor financial situation, then their children are more likely to treat them worse than if they had incomes or were in better

financial situations. This simply indicates the kinship is no longer a guarantee. It was clearly written in the Chinese Constitution that children take the responsibilities and obligations of taking care of the elderly. But it has not turned out the way it was suppose to. Thus, we may have to go further and make more specific laws to protect the elderly.

2. Widowhood Support

The widows and widowers mentioned in this paper refer to those elderly who have lost their spouses or have no children to depend upon. There are some social welfare programs, institutions, and pension systems which have been set up by the government to guarantee a decent life for the elderly. However, there are some problems. One is that people have a tendency to stay away from institutional settings because of the commonly accepted image about institutional life. Another is some people are not satisfied with the service offered there. In Shanghai, there are some community organizations which take care of the senior citizens in the home environment.

3. Management of the Retirees

The total amount of the retirees has been increasing for the last 30 years after the Liberation. According to the statistics found in Shanghai, the ratio of people in and out of the labor force is 2:1, and for certain types of work such as in the textile industry it is about 1:1. Retirees receive pensions and are covered under medical care paid by their ex-employer which have become a big financial and managerial burden to the employer. Furthermore, because retirees do not participate in union activities any more, and merely maintain their memberships, it is most likely that their rights would be ignored by the union administration. Nevertheless, it produced an awkward situation for

retirees. At this point, it might be proper to set up a specific agency which can be totally responsible and provide better management for the retirees. Besides taking good care of them, we should also look into their roles in the family setting and social environment. As for their roles in society, retirees who are healthy and skilled could be in the position of advisers and consultants for some agencies or organizations, or they may help with the work of maintaining the public order, watching for neighborhood safety, and assisting in traffic problems. As for their functions in the family, they can still play a very helpful role in household maintenance or in educating the young generations. By guiding the retirees and putting them in these kinds of activities, it can not only make them feel useful in the societies, but also make their lives more significant.

4. Improvement of the Social Service for the Elderly

The capacity of the welfare institutions for the elderly is limited. Thus, most of the elderly are still widespread in society. As a result, there is a need for providing special services to the elderly. For example, most of the clothing in ordinary shops is not designed with seniors in mind, and there is inconvenience caused by the poor public transportation systems along with long lines for medical care. The elderly are also in need of recreational activities. To establish more educational facilities, publishing more books and magazines for the aged should be a major concern related to this issue.

5. Keep Up the Moral Standard

As a socialist society, we should not only guarantee that each member of society has enough materials to live on, but hope the spiritual life can also

keep up the material environment. In order to enhance the respect for the elderly in our society, it would help if we have one day scheduled as "Senior Citizen Day" or one month for "Senior Citizen Month". In some developed capitalist countries, although some elderly live a wealthy life, they feel isolated and lonely. Their married children are not willing to live with them and do not visit them often; typically, those who are poor are further ignored. Therefore the aged lead an unhappy life; occasionally their only company is a dog or a cat. It is not surprising that many elderly lament that the raising of a dog or a cat is better than raising children.

It has been the tradition for Chinese to support and respect the elderly. After the Liberation, the government has also taken the responsibility of taking care of the elderly in society. Although the living standard of the Chinese people is not as high as in the western countries, the elderly do not have to worry about food and clothing and live a stable life. They enjoy family happiness with their children. Many retirees support and help the younger generation, and thus continue to make contributions to the country. This is the so-called "Chinese Model" which was honored by people all over the world for being able to solve the problem of the elderly. The General Secretary of the UN International Conference on Gerontology pointed out, "I hope China will establish a set of good family relationships and be a world model for taking care of the elderly."

From the standpoint of society, young people should respect the aged, but for the elderly themselves, they should also keep a high moral standard for the young generation to follow. The Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotung, has developed several rules for the elderly, which include: call for continuing study to catch up with the world, pass their knowledge and experiences to the

young people, be a model for the young generation, and keep their physical body in shape. These rules have already gained much support from the elderly. We believe that with the increasing standard of living and the improvement of the spiritual life, the elderly can lead a more meaningful life and make greater contributions to the world.

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